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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of an oral history project designed to help both preservice and inservice teachers gain a sense of perspective as they deal with complex educational changes. Students in the Introduction to Education course were required to select a period of educational history or a topic, such as desegregation, which particularly interested them. They then developed a set of interview questions relevant to the topic and conducted an interview with an individual they had selected as experienced or expert on the subject. The completed tapes, along with a reaction paper relating the information in the tapes to class lectures, readings, and other interviews, were then submitted to the instructor for evaluation. A set of instructions on conducting, analyzing, and reporting the interview is attached. (JD)

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DEVELOPING AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT TO HELP STUDENTS AND TEACHERS
ANALYZE AND UNDERSTAND EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

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DEVELOPING AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT TO HELP STUDENTS AND TEACHERS ANALYZE AND UNDERSTAND EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

The purpose of this presentation is to describe how an oral history project can be developed to help both preservice and practicing teachers gain a sense of perspective as they deal with complex educational changes. Recently these changes, which have resulted from major efforts at educational reform, have been stimulated by numerous commissions offering varied and conflicting recommendations. Often these recommendations have been mandated by legislatures interested in cost effective improvement without any consultation with the teachers who are most affected by these changes.

Providing experiences, in which teachers and students relate the educational theories and philosophies they study in college classrooms to past and present educational policies and practices, seems particularly important in states where massive changes in such areas as curriculum, instructional practices, teacher evaluation and testing are occurring. Examples of such changes affecting teachers in my own state of North Carolina include:

- a. the implementation of the Basic Education Program.
- b. the testing of students for promotion in grades three, six and eight.
- c. the development of a Career Ladder Plan currently being piloted in 16 school units.
- d. the testing of preservice teachers for certification.
- e. the provisional certification and intensive monitoring of beginning teachers for a two year period.
- f. the required use by principals and evaluators of a standard teacher evaluation instrument which contains only those practices derived from the Effective Teaching research which can be assessed objectively.
- g. a state wide training course for teachers in the practices measured on the evaluation form.
- h. an increased emphasis on comprehensive field experiences for undergraduates and continued practicum experiences for graduate students.

While the changes in other states may be quite different, they will reflect current social forces and will require that teachers analyze and adapt to these changes.

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Conducting and analyzing oral interviews provides students and teachers with the opportunity to integrate theory and practice and to study educational change in an enjoyable, relevant, yet academically sound manner. Projects and assignments can be as simple or as complex as needed as there are a variety of resources which can be used in developing these projects. An annotated bibliography of some of these resources is provided as a handout. These resources include handbooks describing techniques for planning, conducting, transcribing, analyzing and storing oral interviews and histories written by historians and experts in folklore. Other references include the more informal methods used in elementary, secondary and college classrooms. Information on the technical aspects of recording interviews and the legal issues involved is also available.

Our oral history project began in the spring of 1987. Following brief instruction in historical and educational philosophies, students in the Introduction to Education course were required to select a period in educational history or a topic, such as desegregation, which particularly interested them. They, then, developed a set of interview questions relevant to the topic. Previous assignments, requiring them to construct questionnaires for interviewing a teacher, a principal, and a parent and to conduct and analyze these interviews, provided background for this assignment. In addition, all students were required to develop a clippings collection which familiarized them with current issues and changes affecting education.

Using simplified techniques for collecting an oral history, students taped an interview with an individual they had identified as having knowledge about or experience with the time or topic selected. Each person interviewed signed a permission form allowing the use of the oral history for the education of teachers and research. The completed tapes, along with a reaction paper relating the information in the tapes to class lectures, readings, and other interviews, were then submitted to the instructor for evaluation. These materials are available as handouts.

The emphasis in written assignments and in class discussions was that students reflect on the information in the tape and compare it with their own classroom experiences and observations as well as with other interviews. For example, students were able to compare interviews of teachers currently teaching with those who had taught during World War II. Another example was the comparison of education in the one room country school in the rural South in the early 1900s to the classroom settings they had experienced or observed.

The most relevant tapes were then duplicated and organized for use by both students and faculty members. Thirty-six tapes covering a wide variety of topics became available for use in class discussion and for individual research. All tapes were accompanied by a table of contents. Some of the topics covered included education in the one room school house, the night schools for children working in the textile mills in the early 1900s, private church schools for black children, the impact of the depression on schooling, vocational education in the 1950s, integration of schools in a small rural community in the South and contemporary education in Australia. Students selected their own subjects and, in some cases, were able to gain interviews with individuals who would not consent to be interviewed by a "stranger."

In the fall of 1987, this process was repeated with the undergraduates. Thirty audiotapes were collected on a wide range of topics including contemporary home schooling, life in a military school and a student's self analysis of a segregated school experience in Washington, D.C. in the 1960s. Students were given the opportunity to listen to tapes collected on the same topic.

Graduate students, taking a one hour practicum accompanying the curriculum course, also could elect to conduct interviews dealing with various aspects of the school curriculum. In this case, graduate students were required to present a practicum plan for approval by the Dean outlining the oral history project and the procedure. A paper containing a literature review as well as an analysis of the topic and the audiotape or videotape was required of graduate students. Oral presentations describing the projects were made in class. Both undergraduate and graduate students were encouraged to use information in the existing tapes to extend and corroborate information in their own tapes.

Because the primary intent of this oral history project was to serve as a teaching tool to help prospective teachers as well as active practitioners deal effectively with educational change, many standard techniques used by researchers in the field of oral history were modified. The very explicit directions given to the undergraduates about preparing for, conducting and analyzing the interviews proved to be most helpful to beginning teacher education students. Also, the use of the packet containing the letter explaining the project, a permission slip and a form for listing topics covered, increased the likelihood that all the necessary paperwork would be completed. Student tapes were used to illustrate interviewing techniques and good tape quality.

Graduate students electing to do an oral history as part of the practicum requirement were usually teachers or administrators. They were encouraged to adapt oral history techniques to meet their needs. Beginning with the resources cited in the annotated bibliography, the materials developed for the undergraduates and the advice of the practicum coordinator during individual conferences, they developed individualized practicum proposals which often included the use of videotapes.

Because of concern about ease of accessibility and the cost of maintaining this collection of teaching tapes, it was decided to use a simple subject and name filing system which could be maintained by a departmental secretary on the computer. The tapes are available for checkout by the students. Backup copies of all tapes are made after the oral history projects are graded and are maintained the department. Directions for developing oral history collections with archives for the tapes and the transcriptions can be found in several of the references listed.

The problems most frequently encountered in doing a project of this type are that:

- a. the quality of the tape may be poor because the student provides his own recording equipment.
- b. students are nervous and/or inexperienced at taping and interviewing.
- c. certain topics such as the one room county school may be popular limiting the range of class discussion.
- d. the instructor must enjoy and have the time to listen to the tapes as well as grade the papers.
- e. adequate storage and access to tapes may be difficult to provide.

The major advantages of this approach, in my opinion, are that:

- a. students develop an appreciation of a variety of approaches to teaching and learning.
- b. students see a direct relationship between the course content and the real world.
- c. students improve their analytical and communication skills.

I have found that oral histories can be adapted to meet a variety of needs. They can often be collected relatively easily and inexpensively by beginning students. However, they also can be used by the more advanced and sophisticated student asking more complex questions, using more advanced equipment and techniques and having better access to funds. Because my goal is to encourage students to integrate theory, research and practice and to analyze educational change, the flexibility of the oral history, when used as a teaching tool, is very helpful.

Directions for the Oral History ProjectA. Conducting the Interview

1. Before you conduct your interview, be sure to:
 - a. check the quality of your tape and tape recorder.
 - b. label your tape with the title of the interview, the names of the narrator and interviewer and the date.
 - c. allow the narrator to read the information letter and sign the permission slip.
 - d. fill in the background information.
 - e. decide on a time period, an educational era or educational events you wish to discuss.
 - f. develop a set of questions or topics that will help to focus the interview on educational events and trends.
 - g. develop rapport with the narrator.
 - h. state your name, the name of the narrator, the topic to be discussed and the date at the beginning of the tape. Play this back before beginning the interview a final check.
2. During the interview:
 - a. gently guide the interview so that the narrator discusses the time or events in which you are interested. Do not ask leading questions.
 - b. keep a list of the topics discussed and any unusual names or terms used.
 - c. go on to another topic if a topic or event seems sensitive.
 - d. if the sequence of events seems confusing, try to ask questions that will clarify dates and events.
3. After the interview:
 - a. thank the narrator orally on behalf of the School of Education as well as yourself.
 - b. check on the spelling of unfamiliar names or words.
 - c. write a note of thanks within the next week.
 - d. listen to the tape and fill out the index of the topics.

B. Analyzing and Reporting on Your Oral History Interview

1. Your analysis of the oral history interview should include:
 - a. a description of the narrator's background. You may wish to include age, occupation, interests etc.
 - b. a discussion of the major focus and content in the interview (e.g. a time period such as the Great Depression or the 60s, experiences teaching in one room country schools or the movement toward school consolidation etc.)
 - c. a discussion of the way this interview relates to your reading, class discussion and your other interviews. Analyze the changes which have taken place and discuss possible reasons for these changes.
 - d. your reaction to the interview.
2. Your written report should:
 - a. be neatly typed or handwritten in black ink.
 - b. have a cover sheet listing the title, the dates the interview was completed and submitted, your name and the course number. The report should be stapled and paper clipped to the information and permission slip.
 - c. be accompanied by your correctly labeled tape. If you wish to keep a copy of the interview, make a copy before turning in the original.
 - d. be approximately four or five pages in length.
 - e. attempt to analyze the interview rather than summarize it.

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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INFORMATION FORM

Narrator (Person Interviewed) _____

Occupation/Background _____

Address _____

Date of Interview _____ Length _____

Place _____

Others present _____

Title or Subject _____

Student Interviewer _____

PERMISSION FORM

I give permission for this tape to be used for the education of
teachers and for educational research.

Signature

Date

CONTENTS

Min. Counter

Topics

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Model of Informational Letter
(to be used with university letterhead)

Dear

Thank you for your willingness to be interviewed. Your participation in this project will help students in our Introduction to Education course develop an understanding and appreciation of some of the changes in education that have occurred during your lifetime. Through sharing your experiences, you can make history come alive and provide a sense of perspective for our students as they begin teaching careers during a time of rapid change.

Please sign the attached permission slip so we can use the tape for educational purposes. If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please call me at 893-4111 ext.2307.

Sincerely,

Margaret L. Giesbrecht
Associate Professor of Education

ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baum, W.K. Transcribing and editing oral history. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981. Rather technical but very complete. Main resource used in developing the handouts developed for undergraduates. Sample forms are useful.

Dunaway, D.K. & Baum, W.K. Oral history: an interdisciplinary anthology. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984. One section in the book is devoted to articles dealing with oral history and the classroom.

Davis, C., Back, K. & MacLean, K. Oral history: from tape to type. Chicago: American Library Association, 1977. Good beginning section on interviewing. Last half of book covers transcribing, editing and disseminating of oral history.

Hoopes, J. Oral history: an introduction for students. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979. An examination of the uses of oral history in the college classroom. Helpful sections on writing the term paper and on dealing with ethical and legal issues. Intended for college students.

Humphries, S. The handbook of oral history: recording: life stories. London: Inter-Action Imprint, 1984. Simple clear directions for developing oral history projects in a variety of settings. British examples. One section deals with oral history in the classroom.

Ives, E.D. The tape-recorded interview: a manual for fieldworkers in folklore and oral history. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980. Good information on equipment, interviewing techniques and the forms and letters needed. No educational applications. .

Jackson, B. Fieldwork. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987.
Text on how to do fieldwork in folklore. Excellent sections on
how to evaluate and use equipment and on ethics.

Jolly, B. Videotaping local history. Nashville: American
Association for State and Local History, 1982.
Easy to understand reference on how to use videotapes in
oral history projects. Good on how to get started and on
equipment.

Neuenschwander, J.N. Oral history and the law. Denton, Texas: Oral
History Association, 1985.
General information on how to avoid legal problems such as
defamation of character and invasion of privacy. Specific
suggestions for teachers and model legal forms.

Sitton, T., Mehaffy, G.L. & Davis, D.L. Oral history: a guide for
Teachers and others. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983.
An examination of the uses of oral history in the classroom.
Many excellent suggestions for different types of projects
as well as technical advice on planning, recording, analyzing
and evaluating interviews. Intended for preservice and
inservice teachers.